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MOSCOW (UPI) -- THE SOVIET UNION HEAPED SARCASM AND COUNTER-CHARGES ON AMERICAN PROTESTS THAT SOVIET GROUND TROOPS WERE STATIONED IN CUBA, BUT DID NOT DENY THEIR PRESENCE.

THE OFFICIAL TASS NEWS AGENCY SAID MONDAY SEN. FRANK CHURCH, D-IDAH, WHO FIRST PUBLICIZED THE PRESENCE OF THE SOVIET FORCES, DISPLAYED "SURPRISING FARSIGHTEDNESS."

CHURCH, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, "WAS ABLE TO SEE WITHOUT ANY OPTICAL DEVICES WHAT DIFFERENT U.S. SERVICES WERE UNABLE TO SPOT PRIOR TO THAT WITH THE HELP OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT," TASS SAID.

HOWEVER, TASS DID NOT DENY THAT SOVIET COMBAT TROOPS WERE IN CUBA. THE "DISCOVERY," THE NEWS AGENCY SAID, ALSO CAME JUST ON THE EVE OF THE SIXTH CONFERENCE OF NONALIGNED NATIONS IN HAVANA.

"IS THIS AN ACCIDENT OR A COINCIDENCE?" TASS ASKED.

"IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE, BUT A DETERMINED EFFORT TO MISLEAD THE DELEGATES TO THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM AND TO 'BLUNT ITS ANTI-IMPERIALIST DIRECTION,'" TASS ANSWERED.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT SATURDAY MADE A PUBLIC PROTEST TO THE SOVIET UNION OVER THE STATIONING OF SOME 3,000 TROOPS IN CUBA, AND CONFIRMED CHURCH'S REPORT THE TROOPS BROUGHT ARTILLERY AND ARMOR WITH THEM INTO THE SMALL ISLAND COUNTRY 90 MILES FROM THE FLORIDA KEYS.

SOVIET AMBASSADOR VLADIMIR VASEV WAS CALLED TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT EARLIER IN THE WEEK FOR TALKS WITH AN UNIDENTIFIED OFFICIAL, AND THE TOP U.S. OFFICIAL IN CUBA, WAYNE SMITH, WAS TOLD TO RAISE THE MATTER WITH THE CUBANS.

STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN HODDING CARTER SAID THE TROOPS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES IN ANY WAY, BUT HE WOULD NOT SPECULATE ON THE SOVIET MOTIVES FOR THE MOVE. HE ALSO DID NOT SAY WHEN THE TROOPS ARRIVED IN CUBA.

SOME U.S. SENATORS HAVE CALLED THE TROOP MOVEMENT REASON TO POSTPONE A DECISION ON THE RATIFICATION OF THE SALT II TREATY UNTIL THE RUSSIANS REMOVE THE MEN.

CARTER SAID THE TROOPS DO NOT CONTRAVENE A 1962 SOVIET-AMERICAN AGREEMENT, WHICH ENDED THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, AS THE AGREEMENT DID NOT REFER TO GROUND TROOPS.

BUT THE BUILDUP IS BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY.

"WE INTEND TO PURSUE THE MATTER. ... WE ARE ACTIVELY PRESSING THE ISSUE," CARTER SAID.

THE TROOPS BRING TO AN ESTIMATED 5,000 THE NUMBER OF UNIFORMED RUSSIANS STATIONED IN CUBA, INCLUDING SOME 1,500 TO 2,000 MILITARY ADVISERS. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 6,000 TO 8,000 SOVIET TECHNICIANS AND ADVISERS IN CUBA.

CARTER ALSO DENIED THAT THE PROTEST BY THE UNITED STATES WAS TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH THE OPENING OF THE NONALIGNED CONFERENCE. THE SPOKESMAN SAID THE UNITED STATES HAS THE HIGHEST HOPES THE CONFERENCE WILL CONTRIBUTE TO WORLD PEACE.

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BY JAMES V. HIGGINS

UPI AUTO WRITER

DETROIT (UPI) -- BARGAINERS FOR GENERAL MOTORS CORP. AND THE UNITED AUTO WORKERS UNION LABORED THROUGH THE LABOR DAY WEEKEND BUT MADE LITTLE PROGRESS ON RESOLVING VITAL NONECONOMIC ISSUES.

"THERE HAS BEEN NO MOVEMENT," UAW VICE PRESIDENT IRVING BLUESTONE, THE UNION'S CHIEF NEGOTIATOR AT GM, SAID MONDAY. "SO FAR, NOTHING HAS BEEN HAPPENING AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE LEVEL."

ANXIOUS TO REACH AGREEMENTS ON DOZENS OF TECHNICAL ISSUES BEFORE THE APPROACHING CONTRACT DEADLINE FORCES SERIOUS MONEY TALK, BOTH SIDES HAVE CONCENTRATED THEIR EFFORTS RECENTLY IN BARGAINING SUBCOMMITTEES.